

Community Preservation Act Proposal
August 31, 2012

Conservation and Planning
David Ziomek, Director
259-3122
ziomekd@amherstma.gov

North Common Project

Description and History of North Common

Amherst has three Town Commons located within the more densely settled areas of the Town Center, East Village, and South Amherst Village Center that were formally recognized and dedicated as commons in 1788 from land in the old highways. The Town Center Common in the downtown is comprised of nearly 3.5 acres of open green space separated into three distinct sections: the South (managed by Amherst College), the Main (the largest section used most frequently for programming and large events) and the North Common. The North Common, which retains the more urban park-like setting with paved pathways, shade trees, benches, sculptural planters, WTCU Fountain, and sitting walls/tree planting boxes, is the focus of this funding request. The North Common is also in closer proximity to the downtown cafés, restaurants and shops, experiencing heavy use from pedestrians and passer byes, picnicking, tourism and sightseeing, special events, and limited passive recreation.

The commercial activity, variety of nearby housing options and extensive public transit service has helped the Town Common thrive. Because of the University and colleges, Amherst is a regional center for employment, services, and educational resources. In addition to the traditional level of visitation generated by the academic institutions and seasonal leaf-peeper 'tourism', Amherst is also becoming an increasingly important destination for cultural and historical tourism. The Town Center Common is a contributing landscape in the Central Business National Historic Register District, and although it has undergone various changes, its character and function has remained consistent throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Attractions such as the Emily Dickinson Museum; the Museum of Natural History and Meade Art Museum at Amherst College; the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art; and the National Yiddish Book Center, have become increasingly popular destinations for people of all ages—with many of these visitors drawn to the Common for its character and social and civic activity.

As Amherst Center has grown and expanded, the Town Common has been the dominant landscape feature, evolving from a swampy hayfield in the early 19th century to an open green lawn on the Main Common and an urban park on the North Common that includes a parking lot, paved walkways, formal seating and shade trees. The parking lot was a mid 20th century addition to accommodate the increased traffic and visitation in the downtown.

Plans for Improvement

The purpose of improving the North Common is to provide the community with a more flexible, programmable space that continues to respect the historic integrity of a landscape that is central to the civic and social activity of Amherst's downtown.

Change is nothing new to the Common, in fact, it has been altered throughout its history to adapt to community needs, cultural trends and civic pride. The Amherst Ornamental Tree Association, formed in 1867, sought to improve the town's public spaces including major changes to the utilitarian Common, which had been used for military exercises, raising hay and grazing, and it contained a pond. The Association believed the Common should be a landscape of distinction, such that they drained and filled the pond, added pedestrian pathways, seating, water fountains and gas-fueled lights, and edged it with decorative fencing and shade trees. The domesticated look of the Common that remains to this day can be attributed to the work of the Ornamental Tree Association. Their improvements made it possible for the Common to serve as a site for community activities, including fairs, rallies, and a farmer's market, and has become one of the town's most beloved green spaces. During the "City Beautiful" movement the Common continued to change as the Town hired renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted to create a design for improving the central common. His plan, while never fully implemented, proposed a revised pattern of roadways, tree plantings, new pedestrian paths, and a formal "music stand" (bandstand).

The Amherst Preservation Plan (2005) emphasized that physical improvements to the Common should be a major short-term goal of the Historical Commission and community, to help fulfill past designs and meets the needs of the community. Recent improvements to the Main Common include burying utility lines, increased accessibility with new 14' wide sidewalks that also provide more opportunities for vendors and programming, additional seating and historic lights. These efforts were fully supported by the community and were the first steps to adapt the Town Center Common to the 21st century and to achieve goals of the Master Plan and Economic Development plan that call for:

- ~ Increasing vibrancy of the downtown with improved amenities, higher density mixed use housing, expanded services and more commercial activity,
- ~ Encouraging community events and activities that draw people to the downtown, and
- ~ Preserving and enhancing Amherst's historic, cultural, and recreational resources

Improvements to the North Common are the next step in this process to meet the community's need for more flexible space in the Town Center that can accommodate small events, seasonal celebrations, and the increased daily activity of the downtown. The Town is applying for a two year design/build PARC grant to hire a professional designer that will prepare appropriate plans. The first year of design will allow for extensive public outreach, involvement of the Historical Commission, LSSE Commission and other boards/committees, and it will help galvanize support the business community, including the newly formed Business Improvement District (BID). The BID would like to increase the visibility and community connections of its members with additional programming on the Town Common and through partnerships to beautify the downtown. Preliminary discussions with the BID indicate that they are willing to support the project either through a one-time donation, by supplying additional amenities and/or providing assistance with annual maintenance. The Town continues to work with the Chamber of Commerce, the Amherst Rotary Club and other organizations to develop partnerships that would contribute to the improvements of the North Common. As an environmental justice (EJ) community, this first year of design will also enable the Town to engage this population for their

recommendations and suggestions. It is important to note that the EJ populations in Amherst are integrated into the same neighborhoods as other residents, and have access to the same utilities, infrastructure, and open space amenities.

The conceptual designs included in this proposal show the North Common as an accessible space with wide generous sidewalks, plazas for special events (bicycle week, lighting of the holiday maple) and as informal gathering space with moveable tables and chairs, substantial bench seating to encourage more picnicking and socializing for visitors, students and business patrons, and an interpretive plaza around the WTCU fountain. These designs provide significantly more space and amenities to utilize the common as an integral outdoor space in the downtown. To ensure that the common will withstand additional foot traffic and use, plans will need to address site drainage, root compaction, durable turf, planting of up to 10 new shade trees in anticipation of future need, and interpretive plaques that show the public the evolution of the common.

Budget

Total Project Cost:	\$528,907.00	
PARC Request:		
FY2013	\$35,000.00	(70% of \$50,000 for design)
FY2014	\$335,234.90	(70% of \$480,000 for construction)
CPA Request:		
CPA	\$158,672.10	
<hr/>		
TOTAL	\$530,000.00	

Urgency of the Project

The need for improvements to the North Common is well documented but public and/or private funding has never materialized. The poor condition of the walkways, trees and planters and more recent concerns about accessibility and safety (tree roots, etc.) have increased the urgency of this effort. The opportunity to match funds from the PARC Grant with local CPA dollars make this a very compelling proposal.

North Common



- Property Map
 --- Aerial Property Lines
 --- Easements
 Basemap
 --- Trails
 Streets
 --- Local Roads
 --- Major Roads
 --- State Routes
 MFD Roads
 --- Limited Access Highway
 --- Interstate Hwy, toll
 --- Other Interchanges
 --- Major Road, Collector
 --- Minor Road, Arterial

Horizontal Datum: MA Stateplane Coordinate System,
 Zone 4151, Datum NAD83, Feet
 Vertical Datum: NAVD88, Feet

Planimetric & topographic basemap features compiled
 at 1"=40' scale from April, 2009 Aerial Photography.
 Parcels compiled to match the basemap;
 revisions are ongoing.

The information depicted on this map is for planning
 purposes only. It may not be adequate for legal boundary
 definition, regulatory interpretation, or property conveyance
 purposes. Utility structure and underground utility
 locations are approximate and require field verification.

THE TOWN OF AMHERST MAKES NO WARRANTIES,
 EXPRESSED OR IMPLIED, CONCERNING THE
 ACCURACY,
 COMPLETENESS, RELIABILITY, OR SUITABILITY OF
 THESE DATA. THE TOWN OF AMHERST DOES NOT
 ASSUME ANY LIABILITY ASSOCIATED WITH THE
 USE OR MISUSE OF THIS INFORMATION.

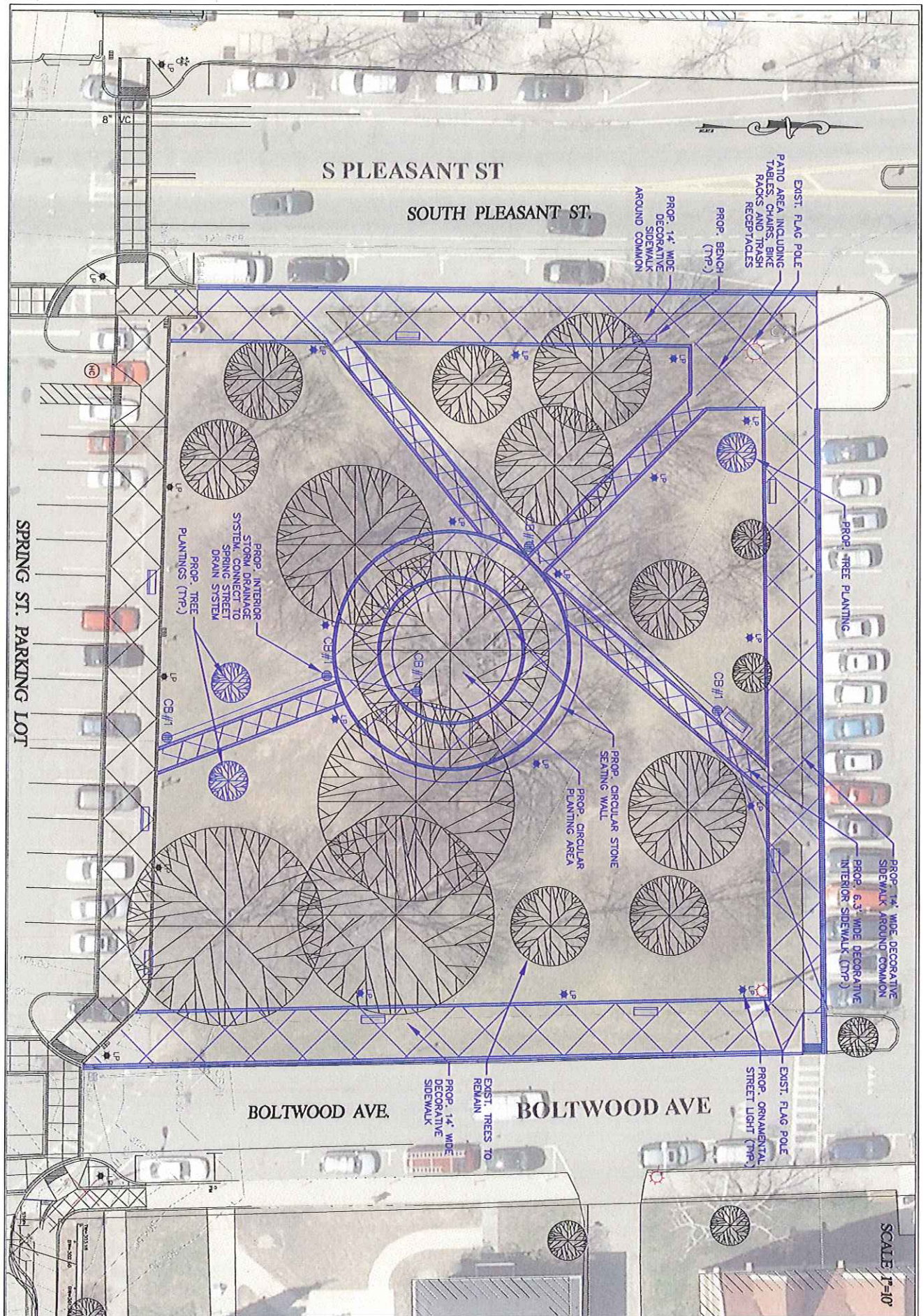


1" = 50 ft

Amherst GIS Viewer

July 10, 2012





	<p>TOWN OF AMHERST DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS ENGINEERING DIVISION 586 SOUTH PLEASANT STREET AMHERST, MA 01002 413-259-3050</p>	<p>TOWN OF AMHERST NORTH COMMON PARC GRANT AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS 01002 CONCEPTUAL PLAN</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>REV.</th><th>DESCRIPTION</th><th>BY</th><th>DATE</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table> <p>DATE: JULY 2, 2012 JOB NO.: 1P10-09</p> <p>SCALE: 1"=10' SHEET: 1 OF 1</p> <p>DRAWN: JGS</p>	REV.	DESCRIPTION	BY	DATE												
REV.	DESCRIPTION	BY	DATE																

Town Common PARC improvements



- Property Map
- Aerial Property Lines
- Easements
- Basemap
- Traffic
- Streets
- Local Roads
- Major Roads
- State Routes
- MHD Roads
- United Access Highw
- Access Road
- Other Numbered High
- Major Road, Collector
- Minor Road, Arterial

Horizontal Datum: MA Stateplane Coordinate System, Zone 4151, Datum NAD83, Feet
 Vertical Datum: NAVD88, Feet

Planimetric & topographic basemap features compiled at 1"=40' scale from April, 2009 Aerial Photography. Parcels compiled to match the basemap; revisions are ongoing.

The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. It may not be adequate for legal boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or property conveyance purposes. Utility structures and underground utility locations are approximate and require field verification.

THE TOWN OF AMHERST MAKES NO WARRANTIES, EXPRESSED OR IMPLIED, CONCERNING THE ACCURACY, COMPLETENESS, RELIABILITY, OR SUITABILITY OF THESE DATA. THE TOWN OF AMHERST DOES NOT ASSUME ANY LIABILITY ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE OR MISUSE OF THIS INFORMATION.

1" = 40 ft
 Amherst GIS Viewer
 July 2, 2012

